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## A study regarding teenagers' self-image and the importance of physical activities in its formation

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** For a teenager, his image is an essential factor for building future relationships.

**Purpose of Study:** This research started from the hypothesis according to which the individuals' constant participation at physical education lessons, as well as the presence of physical exercises in their life, increase their self-esteem and improve their self-image as compared to other individuals from the same group, who refuse to practice physical exercises from their childhood, making use of medical exemptions.

**Conclusions:** The teenage period is a period of reorganising one's self-image, physical, mental health have a determinant role in the formation of a positive self-image, because one's self-image is determinant for cognitive, affective and physical development of teenagers. Moreover, it stimulates their will, their affective qualities, in order to gain behavioural safety and detachment.

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**Keywords:** self-image; physical activities; students; teenage; intellectual health;

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### 1. Introduction

"Self-image may be understood as a mental representation of his/her own person or as an organised structure of declarative knowledge about one's self which guides the social behaviour" (Băban, A., 2001, 66). The manner in which we perceive our own physical, psychological and emotional characteristics, the dimension of our ego and social position give us a self-image. It is very important to have a correct perception over ourselves, to know our limits and to develop correct social relationships, because "self-image is about the sum of perceptions regarding attitudinal abilities and personal behavioural knowledge" (Băban, A., 2001, 66). This process cannot be undertaken randomly, but in an organised context, with

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well defined rules which we may find in the structure of Physical Education lessons. These lessons bring clear notions regarding the attitude and role of each individual within a group, give the notion of fair-play, influence the social and emotional behaviour, shape and strengthen the dimensions of one's ego.

## 2. Hypothesis

Our research started from the hypothesis that the presence of physical exercises in the educational programme of students improves their level of self-esteem, aspect which lacks for the individuals from the same group, who refuse to practice physical exercises even since childhood, using medical exempts as an excuse, thus resulting in a low level of self-esteem.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Subjects

This research was undertaken on a randomly chosen group of 30 students enrolled in the Petroleum-Gas University from Ploiești (15 students frequently participate at physical activities, the other 15 systematically refuse to practice physical exercises even since secondary school, these having medical exempts).

### 3.2. Research methods

Bibliographic study method; Observation method; Investigation method (conversation, questionnaire, etc.); Pedagogical experiment method; Statistical-mathematic method; Graphical method.

### 3.3. Research purpose

The purpose of this research was to emphasize that the presence of physical education lessons in the university programme is an essential factor for adolescents in the process of self-knowledge, an aspect that plays an important role in establishing harmonious relations with others and therefore, in forming a positive self-image.

## 4. Research content

“Self-image plays an important role in our lives: influences the stamina of our emotional state, leads us to our (self) knowledge in relation to others, helps us organise this knowledge in a self-scheme and leads us to achieve a higher level of self-esteem”(Lupșa, E., Bratu, V. 2005, 86).

**Important.** The study undertaken is rather an observation than a research study and directed towards a population segment involved in the Physical Education program which was presented in comparison with the other population segment that does not practice motor activities. For this reason we have applied a closed-answers questionnaire with two possible answers “yes-no” and the theme “How strong is one's self-image” (Chelcea, A., 1997, 20-80). In the questionnaire we followed the establishment of the level of self-image for adolescents and the importance of motric activities in its formation. The questionnaire was divided into 20 items and watched in percentage the quantitative nature of adolescents' self-image. Subjects responded "yes" or "no" to questions in the questionnaire. For our research theme important were only the positive answers, negative answers were just a variant through which statements became true.

The purpose of our research was to emphasize that the presence of Physical Education lessons in the university programme is indispensable for the process of self-knowledge. In this case, self-knowledge, we believe that it is a process developed during a period of time within Physical Education lessons through: sports games which place the individual face to face with himself when he has a decision to make, for example to score a goal. Again, self-knowledge interferes when the individual has to finish a resistance task – which is a task of endurance and self-control– where abandonment would mean to endanger his image in front of his mates. This seems to be the engine that engages, influences the stamina of the affective mood that it will determine the individual to be mobilized to finish something, having an important role in establishing harmonious relations with others and, therefore, in forming a positive self-image. Through a systematic practice of physical exercise in an organised programme with clear rules make individuals who are involved in this process to appear differently (and here we refer to their dress, physical development, the ability to make decisions, how to approach a problem, etc.) as compared to the segment of population not participating in Physical Education lessons, preferring medical exempts instead. In the structure of the questionnaire there were questions of both verification and identification of self-image. These questions were related to how powerful is self-image for individuals who were involved in the Physical Education programme in comparison with another segment of individuals who had medical exempts from physical effort. We applied the questionnaires according to data from Table No. 1 and Graph No. 1. In this table we registered only positive answers which we considered to be representative in identifying self-image perception for the two groups studied, the negative answers being the difference of percentage to 100%.

Table 1. Observation protocol for the applied questionnaire, regarding the identification of self-image according to the affirmative answers

Questions from the questionnaire and the 20 items	Percentage % for affirmative answers - YES	
	Healthy students participating at Physical Education lessons	Students with medical exempts (M.E.)
1. Once you have made a decision, usually you trust to keep it, even though the result is not expected?	83%	17%
2. If you need to go to the toilet during a formal meal, you prefer to wait until the end than to leave the room during the course of dinner?	84%	16%
3. If you want to buy underwear, you prefer to order by mail than go into a shop?	20%	80%
4. Do you think you are loved by the others?	77%	23%
5. If you were improperly served in a shop, would you have the courage to complain to the owner of that restaurant?	67%	23%
6. Do you detest watching photographs of yourself?	13%	87%
7. Do you get angry when people criticise you?	17%	83%
8. Do you have the tendency of keeping your opinions for yourself?	63%	37%
9. Do you find it hard to believe that people are sincere when they say nice things about you?	57%	43%
10. Are you content with your physical appearance?	90%	10%
11. Do you think you are as intellectually and physically capable as most people?	100%	-%
12. If you were at a party and you find that you are wearing a regular dress, while others	20%	80%

wear elegant clothes, would you feel terribly embarrassed?		
13. Do you usually feel inferior to those you meet?	10%	90%
14. Do you think that most of the people like you?	95%	5%
15. Would you describe yourself as a pleasant person?	80%	20%
16. Do you have a sense of humour?	90%	10%
17. Do you finish well all that you do?	100%	-%
18. Do you have a good taste when it comes for clothes?	85%	15%
19. Can you hold yourself when you have a nervous breakdown?	90%	10%
20. Do you work well with other people?	100%	-%

The identification of *self-image* for the questioned students was made on the basis of the positive answers given in percentage for questions recorded in Table No. 1 and Fig. 1. We wanted to make the presentation of these data primarily to identify self-image in people involved in the university Physical Education programme and then in order to make an analysis regarding the dimensions which polarize self-image for people who have not practiced motor activities.

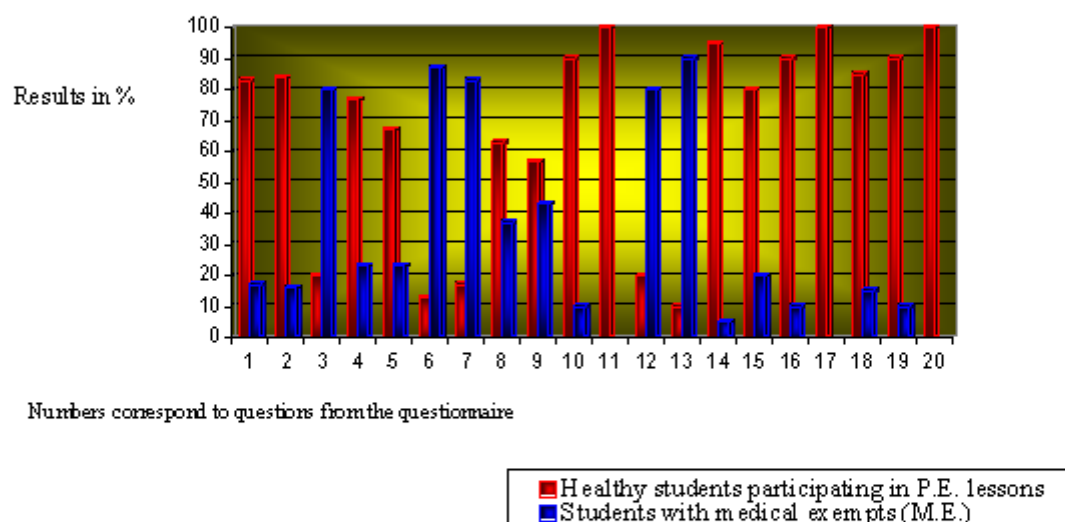


Fig. 1. Representative regarding the identification of *self-image* for questioned students based on positive answers

In order to support the above statements and to argue them, I present the answers in percentage for questions: no. 1 (with answer yes in percentage of 83%, given by healthy students and only 13% from those with medical exemptions); no. 2, (with answer yes in percentage of 83%, given by healthy students and only 13% from those with medical exemptions); no. 4 (with answer yes in percentage of 77%, given by healthy students and only 23% from those with medical exemptions); no. 8 (with answer yes in percentage of 63%, given by healthy students and only 37% from those with medical exemptions); and for questions no. 11 and 17 (with answer yes in percentage of 100%, given by healthy students and none from those with medical exemptions). This aspect is important for our research, thus confirming the hypothesis regarding students who have in their university programme Physical Education lessons, and have a good self-image as compared to the answers recorded from students who have medical exemptions and a low level of their

self-image. As a consequence of the study undertaken about the manner in which students perceive their own physical, psychological and emotional characteristics, the dimension of their ego – self-image – confirms the research hypothesis regarding the importance of motric activities for the formation of self-image, thus determining us to state that physical exercises included in the educational programme of students improve the level of self-image. This aspect lacks for the individuals in the same group, who refuse to practice physical exercises, using medical exemptions as an excuse, which leads to a low level of self-image.

## 5. Conclusions

- This study on adolescent self-image and the importance of motric activities in its formation allowed us to conclude that regularly practiced physical exercise give a state of wellness and a sense of greater confidence in themselves (see answers in Table No. 1).
- An important element in the formation of self-image is the educational environment; the gym can also be a learning environment where students socialise, meet young people of the same age, learn what competition is and how important it is to have self-control in critical situations.
- Students who participate in Physical Education lessons have a positive self-image as compared to students who have medical exemptions (M.E.) and low level of self-image (see answers recorded in Table and Graph 1), which confirms the research hypothesis.
- Physical and intellectual health have a determinant role in the process of formation of one's positive image, due to the fact that self-image is determinant in the process of cognitive, affective and motric development for teenagers, for the stimulation of their will, affective qualities, and in order to gain emotional detachment and behavioural security.
- For adolescents, self-image is an essential factor for the formation of future relations, this being the reason for which the chosen theme may be an open door for other specialists interested in the approached subject.

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